Inventing a New Kind of German:

The BBC German Service and the Bombing War[1]

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'Nation shall speak peace unto nation.' This was the BBC's founding motto in 1927. Barely twelve years later, Britain was once again at war with Germany, and the BBC's German Service was to play a strategic part in Britain's psychological warfare efforts. This chapter examines the Service's output during the later years of the Second World War in order to ask two key questions: how do you *speak* unto a nation that doesn't want to hear you? And how do you speak *peace* unto a nation whose cities you are carpet-bombing? This chapter examines the style of communication the BBC adopted in order to reach Germans, and how it reconciled its mission to broadcast accurate, objective information about the war with communicating the uncomfortable truth that Allied air raids were killing thousands of German civilians. It begins with a brief overview of the German Service's early history with particular reference to its intended listenership, before analysing a number of features scripts in order to show that the BBC German Service's portrayal of the bombing war was closely bound up with its (imagined) target audience of 'ordinary Germans'. I argue that comical and satirical features played a key role in softening the blow of bombing reports and convincing Germans that Britain had their best interests at heart.

The Voice of Britain

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The BBC German Service was founded somewhat hastily in 1938, when Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain wished to broadcast his speech on the Munich Crisis in several different languages, including German. At first operating on an *ad hoc* basis, then as a sub-section of the BBC Features Department, the German Service finally became a department in its own right on 16 April 1939, with five hours and fifteen minutes of allotted daily air time.[2] In October 1940, a twenty-nine-year-old Englishman was placed in charge of the German Service: Hugh Carleton Greene, brother of novelist Graham Greene, was fluent in German, having previously worked as the *Daily Telegraph*'s Berlin correspondent. He proceeded to restructure the Service, adding features, satire, and other formats to its hitherto limited output, while retaining the key focus on news and commentary. By the end of 1941, Greene had given the German Service the shape it would retain until the end of the war, and the entire department moved to Bush House, where it would remain until its closure in 1999. Through chairing daily programme meetings, Greene succeeded in turning a heterogeneous group of British, German, and Austrian writers, journalists, academics, politicians, directors, and actors into an efficient broadcasting team. Over the course of the Second World War, the German Service's importance continued to increase, as did its allotted air time.

One of Greene's first innovations was to change the German Service's introductory announcement from its neutral 'Hier ist der Londoner Rundfunk' ['This is Radio London'] to the clarion call 'Hier ist England! Hier ist England! Hier ist England!' ['This is England! This is England! This is England!'], emphasising the Service's identity as a *British* station rather than a mouthpiece for German-speaking

[2] See Gunda Cannon, *'Hier ist England' – 'Live aus London': Das deutsche Programm der British Broadcasting Corporation 1938-1988* (London: BBC External Services, 1988), p. 3.

émigrés.[3] According to a confidential 1942 BBC report, 'Germans might be distrusted in Germany because they would be regarded there as renegades, so courting in Germany the reaction observed in this country in the case of [Lord] Haw-Haw'.[4] A later report on the German Service's output confirmed that 'the German listener is undoubtedly addressed with the voice of Britain to a degree unequalled in any other of our European Services'.[5] Indeed, the term 'voice of Britain' can be taken quite literally in this context, since almost all on-air commentaries were spoken by British staff members, whereas German and Austrian employees were only permitted to voice particular parts in features, or to appear as newsreaders.[6]

Whilst emphatically insisting on the German Service's British identity, Greene also aimed to improve the style and quality of its German language broadcasts. Initially, all content was scripted in English and subsequently translated into German by different staff. However, in July 1941, Greene complained that a 'good talk or a good news item is not infrequently spoilt by translation into long-winded German'.[7] One of Greene's innovations was to merge the functions of Language Supervisor and Sub-Editor, meaning that all translations were checked by their original author to make the style more accessible and its effect more immediate.[8] Whereas previously scripts had been edited in English, cutting and final edits were now performed on the German text to ensure that the translated item still conveyed the intended meaning. While émigrés such as Robert Lucas, Carl Brinitzer, and Martin Esslin (a.k.a. Julius

[3] See Hugh Carleton Greene, interviewed by Wolfgang Labuhn, '"Hier ist England!": The German Language Service of the BBC during WW II', prod. Peter Schaufler, 8 May 1985 (BBC German Service), A33/164, Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv (DRA), Frankfurt/Main.
[4] 'BBC German Service', 25 March 1942, E1/758/2, BBC Written Archives Centre (BBC WAC).
[5] 'Extract from Output Report of B.B.C. European Services dated January 10th-16th 1942' [corrected to: 1943], p. 2, E1/758/2, BBC WAC.
[6] See Cannon, p. 6.
[7] Memo from Hugh Carleton Greene to European News Editor, subject: 'Suggestions for Reorganisation of German Service', 17 July 1941, R13/148/2, BBC WAC.
[8] See 'Reorganisation of the German Service', BBC Weekly Bulletin, 6 November 1941, E1/758/1, BBC WAC.

Pereszlenyi) now provided most of the scripts, every single one of these still 'had to be read, checked and passed by a British subject in a leading position before it was allowed to go on the air'.[9] In the interests of security, the BBC also assigned switch censors to each of its foreign service departments, who monitored broadcasts and were empowered to switch off microphones in an emergency.[10]

The Nazis attempted to jam British radio propaganda by broadcasting interference noises on the same wavelength. Following a trip to Stockholm in August 1942 to assess the impact of jamming on BBC transmissions, Greene made further changes to the German Service. He concluded that broadcasts were audible even during intense jamming, but that the noise had a tiring effect on listeners, which necessitated stylistic changes.[11] Greene insisted on clear, slower delivery, reducing the number of words per minute. He sought out presenters with 'deep resonant voices rather than high pitched voices'.[12] News bulletins were now read by two announcers presenting alternate items, and elaborate features using complicated effects were eliminated entirely. Moreover, Greene claimed that he and his staff had 'invented a new German style', abolishing long, complicated syntax, and favouring precision and clarity over beauty of expression.[13]

The main way in which the German Service aimed to attract listeners was its claim to be the voice of truth. In December 1938, the BBC's magazine *The Listener* had proclaimed that the Service would provide 'plain, unvarnished news rather than […] sensationalism or propaganda'.[14] The Service hoped that by truthfully reporting

[9] Alfred Starckmann, 'Changing the Guard: The Transition from Emigrés to Recruits on the Staff of the BBC's German Service', in *'Stimme der Wahrheit': German-Language Broadcasting by the BBC*, ed. by Charmian Brinson and Richard Dove (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 185–195 (p. 188).
[10] See Cannon, p. 4.
[11] Ibid., pp. 9–10.
[12] Hugh Greene, 'Visit to Stockholm in 1942', 18 September 1963, E1/758/2, BBC WAC.
[13] Hugh Carleton Greene, interviewed by Labuhn, 'Hier ist England!'.
[14] 'News for Foreigners', *The Listener*, 8 December 1938, p. 1228.

Britain's losses, failures, and military defeats, it would acquire a reputation as an accurate source of information which could then also be believed when it announced Allied victories and advances.[15] The stylistic implications of this were a calm, measured delivery by all speakers and a 'matter-of-fact tone in the commentaries' to contrast with the hectoring sounds of Nazi programmes.[16] A 1942 report on the German Service recorded that '[e]xaggeration, excitement, threats and extravagance in all forms were avoided'.[17]

Although the BBC aimed to set itself apart from Nazi broadcasts by avoiding exaggeration, its claims to truth, authenticity, and objectivity were nevertheless part of a larger propaganda strategy (as Stephanie Seul makes clear in her chapter).[18] In a 1940 policy paper, Greene set out the German Service's key objectives as: '1) to convince the audience that we are likely to win; 2) to make them want us to win'.[19] The double-edged nature of this mission was elaborated a little more in a 1943 report, stating that the German Service consistently aimed

> to break down the will to fight of the German people by convincing them that defeat is certain, but that defeat at the hands of the Allies would not have intolerable consequences for the ordinary citizen. In short, […] to provide a judicious blend of 'despair' and 'hope' propaganda.[20]

While accurate and up-to-date news remained at the heart of all programming, this mixture of 'despair and hope propaganda' was achieved through a variety of other formats, including talks, satirical features, discussions, and music, as well as a weekly

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[15] See Gerard Mansell, *Let Truth Be Told: 50 Years of BBC External Broadcasting* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), pp. 90–91,
[16] Mansell, pp. 163–64; see also Cannon, p.10.
[17] 'BBC German Service', 25 March 1942, E1/758/2, BBC WAC.
[18] See Stephanie Seul, '"Plain, unvarnished news"? The BBC German Service and Chamberlain's Propaganda Campaign Directed at Nazi Germany, 1938-1940', *Media History*, 21 (2015), 378–396 (p. 380).
[19] Hugh Carleton Greene, 'Layout of BBC Broadcasts in German', 3 Sep 1940, p. 1, E1/758/1, BBC WAC.
[20] 'Extract from Output Report of B.B.C. European Services dated January 10th-16th 1942' [corrected to: 1943], E1/758/2, BBC WAC.

round-up of events in Britain ('England diese Woche'). The common denominator was that all of these formats should act as 'a vehicle for propaganda' and 'bait for the news'.[21]

Imagined Audiences

Since listening to the BBC from within Germany and Nazi-occupied territories was necessarily a clandestine activity, it is extremely difficult to estimate the number of listeners during the war years – and harder still to make conclusive statements about their identity. Several sources put forward a figure of ten to fifteen million listeners for the last year of the war, but in the absence of reliable data this is difficult to corroborate.[22] Two factors, however, suggest that listenership in Germany was significant throughout the war: 1) the high penalties imposed on clandestine listeners by the Nazi regime, and 2) the Nazis' persistent attempts at broadcast jamming, which specifically targeted programmes transmitted from London. There is little doubt that listenership increased from autumn 1941 onwards, as the tide of war began to turn and German broadcasters attempted to conceal German defeats and losses.[23]

While the German Service could never be sure of who was actually listening during the war years, it did have a very clear notion of its intended listenership. In a 1985 interview, Hugh Greene claimed that the wartime German Service had been aimed at Germany's 'entire population, whether Nazi or non-Nazi'.[24] He maintained that while the active opposition to Nazism within Germany had been a tiny minority,

[21] 'BBC German Service', 25 March 1942, E1/758/2, BBC WAC.
[22] See Asa Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), p. 236; Cannon, p. 10; Robert Lucas, 'The German Service of the BBC', 7 May 1983, p. 37, RLU 3/1/55, Robert Lucas Papers, Institute of Modern Languages Research, University of London.
[23] See Cannon, pp. 9–10.
[24] Hugh Carleton Greene, interviewed by Labuhn, 'Hier ist England!'.

'there was a large number of people who were generally against it', and that 'a Nazi could be turned around'.[25] Although contemporary statements regarding German attitudes to Nazism were less optimistic, there was a general consensus that the BBC should address itself to ordinary Germans and judiciously differentiate between warmongering Nazis and the supposedly peaceful German population – something the Ministry of Information was also determined to do.[26] A 1943 BBC report on the European Services' output stated: 'We have always made a distinction between the German war machine and the German people'.[27]

Indeed, when Hugh Greene was pushing for a complete restructuring of the Service's translation practices in August 1941, he used precisely this argument to justify his reorganisation plans:

> In connection with my proposal that the final subbing of German Talks and News should be done in German, I think it is worth while to bring to your attention an example of the sort of thing that occurs daily as a result of subbing, translating and language supervising functions being entirely separated.
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> The following sentences occurred this morning in a story included in our 10.00 a.m. bulletin: 'The Berlin wireless was careful yesterday not to mention German losses during this period. German losses at British hands since June 22nd have in fact amounted to 448 aircraft …' These sentences were translated as follows: –
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> 'Der Berliner Rundfunk hütet sich wohlweislich, die Verluste zu erwähnen, die die Deutschen während dieser Zeitspanne erlitten haben. Tatsächlich haben die Deutschen seit dem 22. Juni durch die Royal Air Force 448 Flugzeuge eingebüßt.'
>
> You will note that the use of the phrase 'die Deutschen' gives the German translation a slightly different shade of meaning to the original English. This is much more noticeable when listening in than when reading it. This is admittedly a small point. But it is the sort of small point which matters a great deal at a time when we are trying to avoid identifying the Germans with their rulers.[28]

[25] Ibid.
[26] See Seul, p. 385.
[27] 'Extract from Output Report of B.B.C. European Services dated January 10th-16th 1942' [corrected to: 1943], E1/758/2, BBC WAC.
[28] Memo from Hugh Carleton Greene to Overseas News Editor, subject: 'German Reorganisation Scheme', 23 August 1941, R13/148/2, BBC WAC.

In Greene's view, the German translation placed too much emphasis on the fact that 'the Germans' had sustained significant losses at the hands of the RAF. If rephrased to show that 'the Nazis' or 'the Third Reich' had lost large numbers of aircraft, the item would sound more like a strategic military report with the emphasis squarely on the material disadvantage of the enemy. This would also be closer in tone to the original English bulletin. By contrast, broadcasting the fact that 'the Germans' had lost almost 450 aircraft shifts the focus to the human cost in German lives destroyed when their planes were shot down by the British. This is further emphasized through the use of the participle 'erlitten', a derivative of the verb *leiden* [to suffer], even though the original does not use the phrase 'to suffer losses'. In this instance, Greene was probably right to be so particular about phrasing. The German translation comes close to stating bluntly the unspeakable paradox underlying the German Service's mission: convincing ordinary Germans that Britain had their best interests at heart, when every day the country was taking direct action to kill more Germans.

Telling the Truth about Bombing

Aspiring to be the voice of truth entailed reporting as accurately as possible on Britain's losses during the early war years. However, as the tide of war began to turn and Allied troops gradually gained the upper hand following the German disaster at Stalingrad, the German Service faced a new dilemma: how to convince Germans of the righteousness of the British cause while the British were carpet-bombing their cities and killing thousands of civilians. As more and more German cities came within range of Allied bombers, Germans were now witnessing first-hand the devastation of war and its impact on civilians.

The BBC did not attempt to shroud the air war in silence. Of almost 1,000 extant features scripts for the period from January 1943 to December 1944, over eleven per cent focused wholly or partly on the bombing of German cities.[29] Although these programmes were never the main output, since they were intended as bait to get people to listen to the news, they nevertheless provide a rich corpus for analysis. They ranged from detached, factual reports to invented scenarios and dialogues, the scripts employed a range of different strategies for broaching the sensitive topic of bombing. The satirical features in particular were much less constrained by form than the news bulletins, being fictional in the first place. Comedy series such as 'Kurt und Willi', 'Frau Wernicke' (both scripted by Bruno Adler), and 'The Letters of Corporal Hirnschal' (by Robert Lucas) played an important part in achieving the BBC's 'blend of "despair" and "hope" propaganda' by adopting relatable, average Germans as their protagonists, who could voice German listeners' everyday worries and fears. The following analysis of individual features scripts provides insights into the different strategies the German Service used to talk about the bombing war, the Service's attitude to the German population during the later war years, and the important tonal distinctions between different formats dealing with the same issue.

One of the most frequently used formats for reporting on the bombing war was to give factual information on targets and numbers of bombs dropped. Many scripts simply listed recently targeted cities or numbers of aircraft produced by different countries.[30] Others stressed the considerable advantage in air power Britain and the U.S. had gained over the *Luftwaffe* between 1940 and 1943 by giving updates on

[29] The corpus analysed comprises a total of 976 features scripts for January 1943 to December 1944, of which 66 were wholly and 42 partly concerned with the bombing war. Unfortunately, the features scripts for January to June 1945 (the period including some of the most destructive raids, e.g. Dresden) have been lost.

[30] See e.g. Julius Pereszlenyi, 'Bombing Range', prod. Julius Gellner, 11 August 1943, German Service Scripts: Features (July–December 1943), BBC WAC.

recent war production figures.[31] When reporting on the air war, the German Service constantly sought to keep the focus on tactical and technical details rather than on the human lives lost. The MOI similarly emphasised technical detail in its 'Official War Books' series, which became highly popular, as readers felt they were being trusted with accurate information. In the BBC's case, focusing on the technical aspects of warfare enabled the German Service to point out Britain's superiority and the likely course the air war would take, without drawing too much attention to the fact that thousands of German civilians were losing their lives as a consequence of British actions. The number of scripts drawing on the list format indicates that it was one of the most commonly used for features during the war years. This in itself, however, is remarkable, since it is hard to imagine such lists and comparisons of figures providing a particularly engaging listener experience. One of the format's advantages was that it squarely fulfilled the aim of providing 'straight' and unbiased news. However, these types of scripts could offer little independently verifiable evidence to a listener in Germany, and might therefore easily have been dismissed as British propaganda.

Another way in which the BBC German Service sought to focus more on technical detail and less on the human cost of air raids was to stress in almost every broadcast that Britain was specifically and exclusively aiming at industrial targets. A broadcast on 'Bombing and Production' by Martin Esslin from June 1943 spelt out the aims of Britain's bombing campaign in Germany. It cited German military correspondence claiming that: 'The aim pursued by the British leadership through its air raids on Germany is undoubtedly to bring the armaments industry to a standstill'.[32] The script went on to explain why air raids were particularly focused on the Ruhr:

[31] See e.g. 'England diese Woche', no. 77, 3 September 1943, pp. 5–6, German Service Scripts: Features (July–December 1943), BBC WAC.

[32] 'Das Ziel, das die britische Führung mit ihren Luftangriffen auf Deutschland verfolgt, ist unzweifelhaft das, die Rüstungsindustrie lahmzulegen.' Julius Pereszlenyi, 'Bombing and Production',

2nd VOICE The Ruhr is the largest industrial area of the European mainland…

1st VOICE In 1932, the Ruhr was responsible for almost 75% of coal produced in Germany.

2nd VOICE The Ruhr was responsible for almost 80% of steel produced in Germany.

NARRATOR One cannot move mines to the East. Nor can one move furnaces. In the Ruhr a significant part of German armament potential remains crammed into an area vulnerable to Allied air raids.[33]

Whilst adhering to factually accurate information, the report skilfully avoids any mention of the fact that the Ruhr is also one of Germany's most densely populated areas, and that the repeated air raids on it endangered countless civilians' lives. This strategy was repeated shortly after air raids on Berlin had begun, with a script from September 1943 claiming that 'while the Ruhr is Europe's largest centre for heavy industry, Berlin is the largest European centre for light industry'.[34] Esslin's script explained that strategic air raids were necessary because '40% of Berlin's population, i.e. over 2 million people, work in the war industry', but it made no mention of the fact that these people would potentially be killed, or at best rendered homeless by the air raids on their city.[35] The vast majority of scripts dealing with the air war in 1943–1944 instead stressed Britain's systematic and precise approach to bombing, even though by this point the British had given up on the ideal of bombing accuracy and

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prod. Julius Gellner, 24 June 1943, German Service Scripts: Features (January–June 1943), BBC WAC.

[33] '2. VOICE Das Ruhrgebiet ist der gewaltigste Industriebezirk des europäischen Festlandes ...

1. VOICE Das Ruhrgebiet lieferte 1932 fast 75% der in Deutschland gewonnenen Steinkohle.

2. VOICE Das Ruhrgebiet lieferte fast 80% des in Deutschland erzeugten Stahls.

NARRATOR Bergwerke kann man nicht nach dem Osten verlegen. Auch Hochöfen nicht. Im Ruhrgebiet ist und bleibt ein wesentlicher Teil des deutschen Rüstungspotentials auf engstem Raum den alliierten Luftangriffen ausgesetzt.' Ibid.

[34] '[…] während das Ruhrgebiet das größte Zentrum der Schwerindustrie Europas ist, ist Berlin das größte europäische Zentrum für Leichtindustrie.' Julius Pereszlenyi, 'Topical Berlin', prod. H.W. Buxbaum, 2 September 1943, German Service Scripts: Features (July–December 1943), BBC WAC.

[35] '40% der Bevölkerung Berlins, also über 2.000.000 Menschen arbeiten in der Kriegsindustrie.' Ibid.

were instead undertaking a policy of bombing at night-time to reduce morale.[36] In these scripts, 'ordinary' Germans figured only in their capacity as workers, not as potential victims.

As Allied bombing of German cities intensified over the course of 1943, the German Service frequently directed listeners' attention to the past by stressing that it was the Nazis who had first used the ruthless practice of carpet-bombing as part of their *Blitzkrieg* strategy, and that consequently the German Reich was reaping what it had sown. This was a somewhat harsh message to convey to 'ordinary' Germans experiencing bombing for the first time. One might expect that listeners would not respond well to being told they deserved their current suffering. One way of driving this message home without affronting listeners was to embed it in a comedy feature, which could take more liberties than a factual broadcast. The 'Frau Wernicke' series, written by Bruno Adler and read by actress Annemarie Haase, centred around a garrulous Berlin housewife, who was supposedly devoted to the Fatherland, but whose rants about recent events often betrayed a dislike and distrust of the Nazi leaders. On the subject of bombing, Frau Wernicke contrasted the Germans' attitude at the beginning of the war with more recent reactions:

> Well, back then, when the *Luftwaffe* was superior, we cheered when the English cities burned. I mean, I didn't really notice much of this cheering, perhaps because I don't really mix with the better folk, only with the good ones – but I did read about it in our papers, that we were apparently filled with the deepest gratification. And what back then was just settling accounts and punishment on our part, today that's considered cowardice, meanness, and terror from the other side. And why? Well, obviously, cos now they're the stronger ones.[37]

[36] See Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2013); Dietmar Süß, *Tod aus der Luft: Kriegsgesellschaft und Luftkrieg in Deutschland und England* (Munich: Siedler, 2011).

[37] 'Ja, damals, wie de Luftwaffe ieberlejen war, da ham wa jejubelt, wenn de englischen Städte jebrannt haben. Ick hab zwar nicht jemerkt von den Jubel, vielleicht weil ick nicht mit de bessern Leute vakehre, lieber bloß mit de juten – aber jelesen ha'ck et in unsre Zeitungen, det wa alle erfüllt waren von de tiefste Jenuchtuung. Und wat damals von uns bloß Abrechnung und Strafjericht war det is heute von de andern Feigheit, Jemeinheit und Terror. Und warum? Klar, weil die nu die Stärkeren sind.'

Although Frau Wernicke reminds the listener that 'we cheered when the English cities burned', she is quick to qualify the pronoun 'we' by stressing that she never really witnessed this celebratory attitude and only learned how she was supposed to react from the newspapers. She suspects that the reason for this is her exclusion from high society – the implication being that high-ranking Nazis would have celebrated military victories while the majority of the population carried on as normal. Through a play on words, the script distinguishes between 'the better sort', with whom Frau Wernicke has no contact, and 'the good', whom she prefers. Within the same sentence, the meaning of 'good' shifts from 'wealthy' or 'upper class' to 'morally upstanding' or 'kind', suggesting that ordinary Germans like Frau Wernicke have a better moral compass than their leaders and would not have rejoiced at British suffering at the beginning of the war, but that they are now forced to suffer the consequences of their leaders' actions.

The differences between Nazi leadership and ordinary Germans were a recurring theme of various satirical features, including the 'Kurt und Willi' series, also scripted by Adler and set in Berlin. Kurt was a naïve school teacher, whose best friend Willi worked for the propaganda ministry and could therefore enlighten him as to what was truly going on in Nazi Germany. In a script from December 1943, the two meet not in their usual café on Potsdamer Platz but in a run-down remote bar, because – as Willi informs Kurt – the intensifying air raids on Berlin mean that 'not

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Bruno Adler, 'Frau Wernicke on Bombing, Führer's Health etc.', prod. Julius Gellner, 13 March 1943, German Service Scripts: Features (January–June 1943), BBC WAC.

even the bank vaults are safe anymore'.[38] This leads Kurt and Willi to discuss the impact of the most recent raids on Berlin:

> WILLI My God, do you have any idea what kind of catastrophic confusion there's been in the better circles since the large banks have been hit?!
>
> KURT Well, to be honest, Willi, the fellow citizens with whom I've been spending these past dreadful nights aren't overly concerned with that. They're happy that they just about made it out alive.[39]

By using the two friends as examples, the broadcast stresses the diverging priorities of different social classes as concerns the effects of bombing: while high ranking officials are mainly concerned with the security of their assets and accumulated wealth, ordinary Germans consider themselves lucky if they can escape a raid alive.

Another way of highlighting the gap between Nazi officials and ordinary people was to contrast responses of the British and German leadership to the bombing of civilian targets. In a July 1943 broadcast, the Head of the features department Marius Goring (under his pseudonym Charles Richardson) stressed that the London Blitz had served to strengthen the unity of purpose between the British people and their government:

> The way in which King George, the Queen, and Winston Churchill observed the progress of the attacks, personally supporting practical aid on the ground again and again, is only one symbol of this unity.[40]

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[38] 'Nicht mal die Bankgewölbe sind mehr sicher.' Bruno Adler, 'Kurt and Willi: Bombing and Conferences', prod. H.W. Buxbaum, 7 December 1943, German Service Scripts: Features (July–December 1943), BBC WAC.

[39] 'WILLI Mensch, hast du ne Ahnung, was für ne katastrophale Verwirrung in den besseren Kreisen herrscht, seit die Grossbanken getroffen worden sind?!

KURT Also – um die Wahrheit zu sagen, Willi – die Volksgenossen, mit denen ich in diesen Schreckensnächten zu tun hatte, sind davon nicht übermäßig beunruhigt. Die sind froh, dass sie ihr nacktes Leben retten konnten.' Ibid.

[40] 'Die Art wie König Georg, die Königin und Winston Churchill den Verlauf der Angriffe verfolgten, wie sie immer wieder persönlich an Ort und Stelle für Hilfsmaßnahmen sorgten, ist nur ein Zeichen dieser Einheit.' Julius Pereszlenyi, 'The Third Dimension', prod. H.W. Buxbaum, 10 July 1943, German Service Scripts: Features (July–December 1943), BBC WAC.

The German Service contrasted the British leadership's caring attitude with Hitler's cynical disregard for human lives lost in his quest for power – again using Frau Wernicke as a mouthpiece. In a fictional (and entirely one-sided) conversation between Frau Wernicke and Ivan, the Ukrainian waiter in her local Berlin pub, she is keen to stress Hitler's concern for bombing victims:

> But don't you go thinking that it's just us that are worried about our bombed out fellow citizens, our Adolf himself is too. And just so you have an idea of how worried he is – just the other day after the heavy attack on Bochum, where apparently it rained down thousand-kilo-bombs like leaflets, he was so terribly worried that he … well, what do you think he did in his pain?
>
> No, no, you'll never guess: he TELEPHONED! Believe it or not! Just imagine, he phoned up *Gauleiter* Hoffmann, actually phoned him, and asked how it's all going in Bochum…[41]

Not only does the monologue convey some factual information (i.e. there has recently been a significant air raid on Bochum), but Wernicke's praise for Hitler's reaction is structured as a guessing game for her interlocutor, thus building up suspense by delaying the reveal of what Hitler actually did after the raid. This build up of tension is followed by a deflating let-down, in which Hitler's action of telephoning the local administrator functions as a kind of punch line to stress its complete inadequacy as a response to the victims' suffering.

This script also directly compares Hitler's reaction with that of the British leadership, when Wernicke repeats what her interlocutor Ivan has supposedly interjected:

[41] 'Aber jloob nich, det bloß wir uns sorjen um de ausjebombten Volksjenossen, det tut sojar unser Adolf höchstpersönlich. Und damit du dir nen Bejriff machst, wie der sich sorgt – neulich nach den schweren Anjriff uf Bochum, wo et de Tausendkilobomben bloß so jeregnet haben soll wie Flugblätter, da hat er sich so furchtbar jesorgt, det er ... na wat denkste, wat der in sein' Schmerz jemacht hat!
Nee nee, det errätste nich: TELEFONIERT hat er! Ob's de's jloobst oder nich! Stell dir det bloß mal vor, den Jauleiter Hoffman hat er anjerufen, richtig anjerufen und jefragt, wie et denn so jeht in Bochum...' Bruno Adler, 'Frau Wernicke on Air Raid Victims and the Führer', prod. Julius Gellner, 26 June 1943, German Service Scripts: Features (January–June 1943), BBC WAC.

> Churchill, that old stuffed shirt, goes to see the people after an air raid, you say, and even the English King and Queen clamber about in the ruins? Gosh, just imagine, if our *Führer* stood at the graves of the victims – what do you reckon would happen! What – what's that you say? – Bloody hell, they'd push him in? Well, you're a fine one – that leaves even me gobsmacked![42]

The question of what would happen if Hitler went to mourn at the graveside of recent bombing victims sets up the next joke, which is reported second-hand from Ivan who remains just out of earshot. Thus, Frau Wernicke's own belief in the *Führer* is not called into question, but she is still forced to parrot the curmudgeonly suggestion that many Germans might be tempted to push Hitler into a grave alongside the civilian victims. Although her reaction to this is one of shock, Wernicke does not contradict Ivan or suggest that what he is saying constitutes treason. The script sets up a sense of complicity with its listeners, inviting them to share in a gleeful, illicit thought experiment of simply disposing of Hitler in the manner of a slapstick comedy gag.

An interesting exception to the rule of using humour to discuss the effects of bombing on ordinary Germans was a script for the women's programme from July 1943, which focused on the fact that Hitler's disastrous Russian campaign was keeping German men far away from their families. After presenting an old song from Westphalia, the narrator muses:

> I can imagine that the soldiers from Westphalia are particularly homesick for their wives and families, for today the gigantic battle over Germany's heavy industry is being fought over Westphalia, over the Ruhr.[43]

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[42] 'Der Tschurtschill, der olle Waschlappen, der jeht nach nem Luftanjriff zu de Bevölkerung, sagste, und sojar der englische König und de Könjin steijen in de Ruinen rum? Mensch, mal dir doch det mal aus, wenn unser Führer an dem Jrab von de Opfer stünde – wat gloobste wat da passieren würde! Wat – wat sagste? – Heiljer Strohsack, rinschubsen würden se ihm? Mensch, du bist ne Nummer – da bleibt sojar mir de Spucke weg!' Ibid.

[43] '[…] ich kann mir vorstellen, dass die Soldaten aus Westfalen sich besonders nach Hause sehnen zu ihren Frauen und Familien, denn über Westfalen, über der Ruhr tobt heute die gewaltige Schlacht um Deutschlands Schwerindustrie.' Julius Pereszlenyi, 'A Song of Woe', prod. H.W. Buxbaum, 8 July 1943, German Service Scripts: Features (July–December 1943), BBC WAC.

The bombing of the Ruhr is still associated with heavy industry, but the script's focus is specifically on these men's attachment to their loved ones, who are in peril due to the British air raids:

> These men in the East are at the front and they know that their wives at home are also at the front. Two-thousand kilometres lie between these fronts and the men cannot get home to see how their families are doing.[44]

Instead of detailing what could potentially have happened to the soldiers' wives while their husbands are away on the Eastern front, the broadcast describes the wives themselves as being 'at the front', thus also turning them into combatants. This description of the two fronts emphasises the danger both parties face, but does so without dwelling on their emotional responses to it. The script walks a fine line between acknowledging the men's fears for their families' safety and not providing any concrete detail on the dangers they face as a consequence of British raids.

The script that dealt most explicitly with the air war's impact on people's lives was once again a satirical feature. Robert Lucas's series 'The Letters of Corporal Hirnschal' was an epistolary comedy feature in which a simple soldier, Adolf Hirnschal, wrote to his wife Amalia, detailing his naïve and fervent belief in the righteousness of the *Führer*'s cause, but simultaneously exposing the glaring contradictions between Nazi ideology and wartime reality. In this particular letter, Hirnschal reports a conversation with his fellow soldier Katting, who owns a farm in Westphalia:

> 'Hirnschal,' says tall Katting all of a sudden, 'How long is this going to go on for? What are we actually fighting for?' And I answer him: 'They say we're fighting for our beloved German homeland.' – 'Then why are we stuck here in Russia,' says Katting, 'thousands of kilometres from our "homeland", while the bombs are falling on our cities?' I get a bit nervous at that and answer: 'They also say we're

[44] '[…] diese Männer im Osten stehen an der Front und sie wissen, dass auch ihre Frauen zu hause an der Front sind, zweitausend Kilometer liegen zwischen diesen Fronten und die Männer können nicht heim, zu sehen wie es ihrer Familie geht.' Ibid.

> fighting for our families, Katting.' At that Katting sits up and says: 'Then why don't we just go home, now that our families are in danger? That's our damn duty, Hirnschal, we can't just leave our wives and children in the lurch in their hour of need.' – At that I shake my head and say: 'You don't understand, Katting. Our beloved Führer can't let that happen. If we all go home, who's going to fight the Bolsheviks and the plutocrats? The whole war will be over if we just go home.' But at that tall Katting jumps up all excited and says: 'Damn right, Hirnschal, then the whole war will be over, and if the war is over, then our families will no longer be in danger.'[45]

By transposing them into a comic mode, the script is able to voice an ordinary soldier's fears about his family's safety, whilst simultaneously exposing the absurdity of attempting to defend the German homeland and the German people on the remote Russian front. Katting's concern at not being able to help his family in their 'hour of need' is genuine and relatable, thus undermining Hirnschal's increasingly paradoxical claims as to what they are fighting for. The logical conclusion Katting draws from Hirnschal's explanations that if they all go home, 'then the whole war will be over, and if the war is over, then our families will no longer be in danger', reads rather like a simplified summary of the BBC German Service's aims and objectives.

A common thread running through all the BBC German Service's policy decisions and scriptwriting choices during wartime was its aim to speak to (and perhaps for) a broad audience of ordinary Germans. The analysis of features scripts shows that in

[45] '"Hirnschal," sagt auf einmal der lange Katting, "Wie lang wird das noch so weitergehen? Wofür kämpfen wir denn eigentlich?" Und ich antworte: "Sie sagen, wir kämpfen für unsere deutsche Heimat." – "Warum sitzen wir dann hier in Russland," meint drauf der Katting, "tausende Kilometer von unserer 'Heimat' entfernt, wenn die Bomben auf unsere Städte fallen?" Darauf werde ich ein wenig nervös und antworte: "Sie sagen auch, wir kämpfen für unsere Familien, Katting." Darauf setzt sich der Katting auf und sagt: "Warum gehen wir dann nicht gleich nach Hause, wo unsere Familien jetzt in Gefahr sind? Das ist doch unsere verdammte Pflicht und Schuldigkeit, Hirnschal, wir dürfen doch unsere Frauen und Kinder in der Stunde der Not nicht im Stich lassen." – Darauf schüttle ich den Kopf und sage: "Das verstehst du nicht, Katting. Das kann doch unser geliebter Führer nicht zulassen. Wenn wir alle nach Hause gehen, wer wird denn dann gegen die Bolschewiken und gegen die Plutokraten kämpfen? Dann ist doch der ganze Krieg zu Ende, wenn wir einfach nach Hause gehen." Aber da springt der lange Katting ganz aufgeregt auf und sagt: "Ganz richtig, Hirnschal, dann ist der Krieg zu Ende, und wenn der Krieg zu Ende ist, dann sind doch unsere Familien nicht mehr in Gefahr."' Robert Ehrenzweig [a.k.a. Robert Lucas], 'Hirnschal Letter No. 64', prod. Julius Gellner, 28 June 1943, German Service Scripts: Features (January–June 1943), BBC WAC.

regard to the complex issue of British air raids, the German Service was forced to walk a very fine line between supporting British military strategy and convincing Germans that it was their leaders not they themselves who were under attack – despite appearances to the contrary. One reason for this was the BBC's need to attract a German audience in unfavourable conditions. Accusing all Germans of having started the war was hardly a good way to garner new listeners or to keep the existing ones interested. However, reporting somewhat accurately on the bombing war without making German listeners feel victimised by the British was a difficult task: the BBC therefore attempted to redirect its listeners' resentment for the air raids away from the British government and towards the Nazi leadership.

In its quest to appeal to the broadest possible audience within enemy territory, the BBC German Service tried to address a fictional category of "ordinary" Germans, who were neither Nazi officials, nor part of the active political opposition, nor persecuted minorities, but still politically interested enough to risk listening to enemy broadcasts. These exclusionary factors are similar to Elizabeth Heineman's findings on how Germans tend to categorise their experiences when being interviewed for histories of everyday life in wartime and postwar Germany:

> Histories of everyday life and oral histories often attest to the ways non-persecuted and non-activist Germans recall a past of 'ordinary Germans' that excludes the experience of the persecuted and the activists, who numbered in the millions. This opposition of 'ordinary Germans' to the 'others' has helped to create an apparently homogenous category of 'ordinary Germans' that downplays significant differences among them.[46]

Instead of a retrospective categorisation by Germans themselves during the postwar era, the BBC's (and MOI's) explicit strategy of distinguishing between Nazis and

[46] Elizabeth Heineman, 'The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's "Crisis Years" and West German National Identity', *The American Historical Review* 101 (1996), 354–395 (p. 357).

‘ordinary Germans’ suggests that this was a viewpoint already encouraged through British propaganda during the war. A variety of different programmes invited listeners to identify with a fictional German ‘man on the street’, and thus encouraged listeners to think of themselves as ‘ordinary Germans’ – a category whose main characteristics included war-weariness and disillusionment with the Nazi leadership. This potentially enabled any Germans who did not feel they had benefited sufficiently from the war to consider themselves victims of Nazi oppression rather than fellow-travellers and enablers of a monstrous regime. In this way, the BBC German Service may well have played a significant role in constructing one of postwar Germany’s founding myths, by inventing a new kind of German to suit its wartime output.